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**SERVICE CHARTERS - GLOBAL
CONVERGENCE OR NATIONAL
DIVERGENCE? A COMPARISON OF
INITIATIVES IN AUSTRALIA, THE
UNITED KINGDOM AND THE UNITED
STATES**

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Abstract

This paper examines the transfer of NPM strategies by comparing service charter initiatives in the United Kingdom (UK), United States (US) and Australia. These three countries, together with Canada and New Zealand, are part of what has been described as the "core" New Public Management (NPM) policy community (Common 1998). Service Charters are a NPM strategy intended to change the culture of public service delivery to focus on the needs of the users, identified as 'clients' or 'customers'. The objectives are to make service providers more responsive to users by guaranteeing specific standards for service delivery, providing a substitute for competition and a benchmark for measuring service quality.

The first section examines the historical and political context of the development of the Citizen's Charter and Service First programs in the UK, Customer Service Plans in the US and Government Service Charters in Australia. The second section of the paper explores the similarities and differences between these charter initiatives based on analysis of public documents. There is evidence of convergence at the ideological level as managerial values underpin the service charter frameworks in all three jurisdictions (Walsh 1994; Pollitt 1995; Kettl 1997). Despite drawing from a similar toolkit influenced by private sector techniques, significant differences between the country contexts have resulted in divergent strategies. Timing in the three countries examined suggests that national politics rather than global policy convergence is more significant in explaining the development of service charters. This case study provides evidence of policy transfer rather than policy convergence (Common 1998).

The final section of the paper considers the limitations of the customer service model. Monitoring quality is central to the programs in all three countries. Performance monitoring is essentially a quantitative methodology that requires criteria and indicators for measuring the quality of service delivery and program outcomes. Two problems are considered. The first is the difficulty of specifying and measuring service quality. The second problem is that quality indicators derived from services marketing and management research do not take into account the characteristics of public services.

**SERVICE CHARTERS – GLOBAL CONVERGENCE OR NATIONAL DIVERGENCE?
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RESPONSIVE GOVERNMENT - “DOING MORE WITH LESS BUT DOING IT NICER”¹

Services to the community are a substantive part of government budgets and public policy. Community demand for public services is increasing and governments face resource constraints arising from the pressure to achieve budget surpluses. The demand is for greater value, that is better services at lower cost. The choice is stark, governments have to increase productivity and service quality or reduce services. At the same time, recipients of public services or their advocates increasingly expect to participate in the design and delivery of public services (O’Faircheallaigh, Wanna & Weller 1999). Together this has created pressure for substantive changes in the funding and delivery of public services to increase efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness to users. Governments have responded to these pressures with public management reforms intended to improve performance by making service providers more accountable for results achieved. Performance management is the foundation of what has become known as New Public Management (NPM) (Hood 1991; Pollitt 1995; Hughes 1998). Governments want to improve quality and cost effectiveness of public services for the benefit of users or clients, taxpayers and the community.

Since 1990, the OECD’s Public Management Committee (PUMA) reports analysing and evaluating public management developments in member countries, have supported managerialist reforms including service quality initiatives (PUMA 1994; 1996; 1997 & 1999b). In March 1996 the OECD held its first Ministerial meeting on Public Management chaired by Alice Rivlin, then director of the US Office of Budget and Management (Osborne & Plastrik 1997: 8). The summary report of that meeting identified a number of similarities in public management reform in member countries. These included decentralisation; re-examining the role of government (what it should do and pay for); downsizing; contracting, market mechanisms and user charges; customer orientation including explicit quality standards for public services; benchmarking; and simplifying and reducing the costs of regulation.

Service charters are in essence a quality assurance strategy that offers a type of consumer guarantee. An explicit objective is to improve the responsiveness of public services providers to clients or users. The UK Citizen’s Charter pioneered the application of consumerism to public services (Walsh 1994). Despite the title, the Citizen’s Charter conceived of consumers of public services as customers rather than citizens. PUMA has had a role in disseminating the UK experience in developing the first comprehensive service charter initiative. Customer service plans, introduced in the US in 1993 by the Clinton Administration, and the Australian Government Service Charters introduced by the Howard Government in 1998, were both influenced by the Citizen’s Charter.

The service charter initiatives are based on a common idea of extending the market logic of consumer sovereignty to public services provision (Pollitt 1994, Walsh 1994). There are essentially two approaches to increasing the sovereign power of consumers of public services. The first is to make providers more responsive to consumers by through consultation and more accountable to government and the community through performance monitoring. Consumer power depends on the effectiveness of voice mechanisms. The second approach is to make providers more responsive to consumers by providing consumers with choice based on competition between providers of public services. Despite the rhetoric of choice, service charters generally rely on voice mechanisms in the form of monitoring performance against specified standards and complaint mechanisms. Service charters programs have incorporated a range of quality assurance techniques including setting service standards, consultative mechanisms, providing information to citizens and clients, complaints and redress mechanisms and quality awards.

¹ This was the title of a paper on internal marketing by O’Connor & Shewchuck included in the Best Papers Proceedings of the 55th Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management in 1995.

Three countries were selected for a comparative analysis of the transfer of service charters as a NPM strategy. Australia, UK and USA (together with Canada and New Zealand) are part of what has been described as the “core” New Public Management policy community (Common 1998). Figure 1 summarises the phases in NPM reform in each country. Figure 2 illustrates the timing of the service charter programs in each country. The analysis was based on examination of public documents including official reports, OECD reports and comparative studies and independent evaluations. The documentary sources of evidence are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Documentary Sources for Country Analysis

United Kingdom	United States	Australia
Service First website: www.servicefirst.gov.uk/	National Partnership for Reinventing Government website: www.npr.gov	Service Charters Unit, Competitive Tendering & Contracting Branch, Department of Finance and Administration website www.ctc.gov.au/charters/
OECD PUMA Public Management Profiles 1992 PUMA (1996) Survey <i>In Search of Results</i> PUMA Public Information on the United Kingdom 1998 Schick (1999) Cabinet Office (1999)	OECD PUMA Public Management Profiles 1992 PUMA (1996) Survey <i>In Search of Results</i> PUMA Public Information on the United States 1998 Schick (1999)	OECD PUMA Public Management Profiles 1992 PUMA (1996) Survey <i>In Search of Results</i> PUMA Public Information on Australia 1998 Schick (1999)
External evaluation Institute for Policy Research evaluation (Boyne 1996)	External evaluation Brookings Institution’s Centre for Public Management evaluation (Kettl 1994 & 1997)	Internal evaluation Special Minister of State (Ellison 1999)

Figure 1 Phases NPM Reform

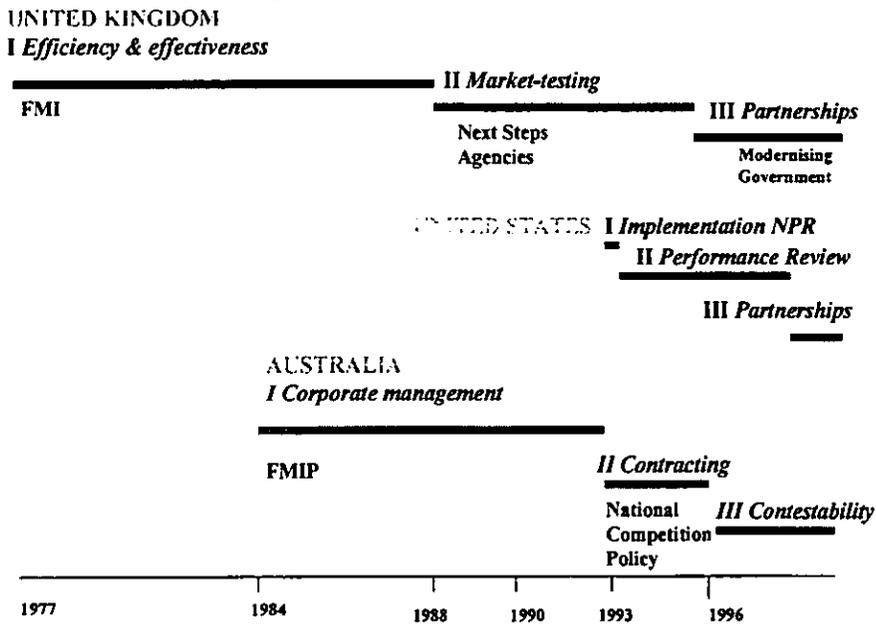
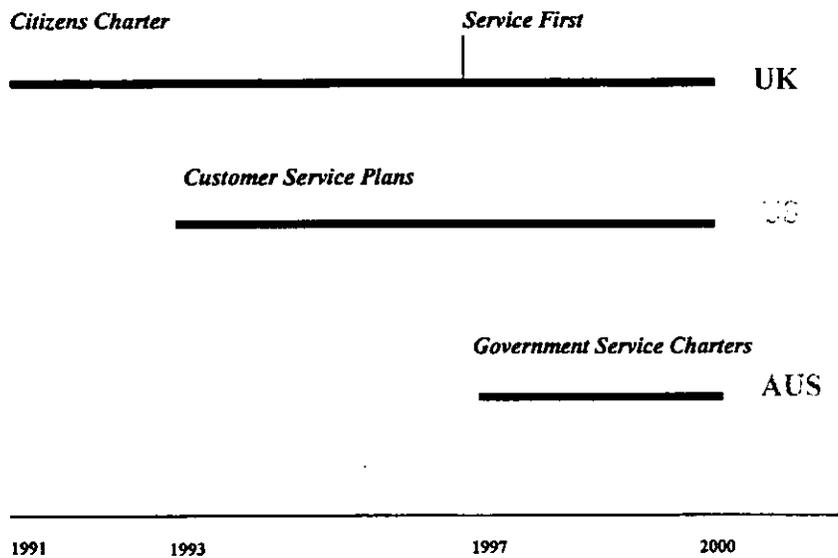


Figure 2 Service Charter Initiatives



UNITED KINGDOM: CITIZEN'S CHARTER – "RAISING THE STANDARDS"

The United Kingdom (UK) has the longest history of new public management reforms of the three countries in this study, and was the first to implement service charters. A chronology of the development of the Citizen's Charter program in the context of NPM reform from 1979 to 1999 is provided in Appendix 1. Citizen's Charter, John Major's first initiative on becoming Prime Minister, was a part of a second and more radical wave of administrative reform. This followed a decade of reform instituted by Margaret Thatcher's conservative government under the Financial Management Initiative (FMI). The second phase commenced in 1988 with the introduction of Next Steps Executive Agencies, which sought to separate policy and service delivery and introduced market based strategies to break the monopoly position of public service providers. Clear accountability for performance was a central element of Next Steps as separation of executive agencies and contracting required new forms of accountability. The Citizen's Charter added measures aimed at changing the focus of public services from the requirements of providers to users designated as customers (Bynoe 1996). The principle of responsiveness to users was central to Citizen's Charters (Keeble 1996).

Charters were used before 1991 but mainly in local government authorities (Walsh 1994). Charters were conceived of as a consumer contract guaranteeing service standards.² Users of public services are explicitly recognised in Charters as consumers with the rights to specified standards and redress if these standards were not met. The Citizen's Charter, introduced as a ten year program, was based on six principles for serving the public called the "Six Whitehall Standards" – setting standards, information and openness, choice and consultation, courtesy and helpfulness, putting things right & value for money. These principles reflected four themes of quality, choice, standards and value for money (Bynoe 1996). The Charter applied to the whole of the public sector and to privatised utilities. A Charter Mark award scheme was introduced in 1992 to promote excellence and has subsequently been adapted by other OECD countries including the USA, Canada, France, Belgium and Italy (Osborne & Plastrik 1997: 195). To win a Charter Mark agencies had to demonstrate service met the six principles, user satisfaction with service delivery and measurable and demonstrative improvements in service quality. Service providers were required to reapply for Charter Marks after three years. In the first year 36 Charter Marks were awarded and by 1996 the number increased to 417 (Keeble 1996). Charter Mark award winners were given a high profile within the civil service.

Citizen's Charter had high level political support being introduced and championed by the Prime Minister John Major. A new unit was created in the Office for Public Service, the central agency responsible for public service policy to implement the Citizen Charter program. The Unit's role was to spread best practice, monitor and report progress and administer the Charter Mark scheme (Bynoe 1996; Keeble 1996). The Audit Commission role in developing indicators for local authorities and the NHS was essential in implementing Charter policy (Bynoe 1996). The private sector also had direct influence. The Citizen's Charter Unit worked closely with the Prime Minister's Charter Advisory Panel. Six panel members were drawn from the public and private sectors and the chair was the CEO of Boots plc (Keeble 1996).

Citizen's Charter has a high public profile within the civil service but the public impact is harder to assess. More than 40 national and 10,000 local charters have been developed since 1991 (OECD 1999 UK Perspective). Evidence of its contribution to improving public services by changing the culture of agencies to focus on service recipients was recognised by the National Audit Office, Public Service Committee and National Consumer Council Survey. However national charters were generally published without systematic public consultation (Bynoe 1996). The National Consumer Council identified effective consultation with users as the single most important issue for charters. Critics argue that standards reflected provider rather than consumer concerns and charter services frequently failed to deliver even on these rather. An extensive evaluation by the Institute for Public Policy Research was critical of the narrow scope of the customer perspective and proposed a new program based six social rights principles of fair treatment, entitlement,

² The idea of service guarantees was prevalent in the services management literature at this time (Hart 1988 & 1993), but it is not clear to what extent this influenced the development of the Citizen's Charter.

participation, openness, accountability and co-operation, and, effective public accountability through audit and inspection (Bynoe 1996).

UNITED KINGDOM: SERVICE FIRST – “RESPONSIVENESS”

With the election of Tony Blair’s Labor Government in 1996, at least the rhetoric of public management changed from “value for money” to “partnerships”(Richards 1996). After a year in review, Citizen’s Charter became Service First as part of the broader Better Government program covering the entire public sector. A new audit team to monitor quality and a review of all existing charters were part of the package. Nine principles of public service delivery replaced the six Whitehall Standards (see Appendix 1). Key themes were identified as partnership, responsiveness to users, accessibility, more effective use of resources, fair treatment and innovation. A Service First Unit to coordinate implementation was again located in the Cabinet Office. One innovation was the establishment of a People’s Panel of 5,000 members of the public randomly selected set up by MORI and Birmingham University’s School of Public Policy to be surveyed and consulted about service delivery improvement and gauge the effectiveness of public management reforms.

The revised charter has been influenced by experience abroad. The Service First Unit apparently used Australian charter guidelines as a reference in developing the new charter program (Service First Newsletter Issue 2 July 1998). There is an apparent shift to external performance monitoring. Central monitoring of performance is a feature of the 1999 Modernising Government White Paper with the establishment of a new Cabinet Committee. The focus of comprehensive spending reviews of all central agencies and local government services is to be on outcomes taking into account customers’ views. A benchmark has been set of a 5% improvement in satisfaction by April 2000.

UNITED STATES: CUSTOMER SERVICE PLANS –“PUTTING CUSTOMERS FIRST”

Customer service plans rather service charter are the basis of the US responsiveness strategy, however these plans draw on similar techniques. A chronology of the development of customer service plans in the in the context of NPR reform from 1992 to 1999 is provided in Appendix 2. The US was a relative latecomer to NPM, with the Clinton Administration’s National Performance in 1993. NPR has been identified as one of the three most important administrative reform initiatives of the twentieth century in the US (Kettl 1994 & 1998).³ Similarly to the UK there are identifiable phases linked to political events. Kettl (1998) identified three phases of reform. Phase I “Reforming Government Processes” in 1994 focused on implementation. An Executive Order that all federal agencies develop customer service plans was one element of the reinventing package, but downsizing was the dominant theme. Phase II “Questioning What Government Should Do” followed the 1994 mid term congressional elections which resulted in Republican control of the legislature. Phase III “Reinvigorating the Reinvention” commencing in 1988 shifted the focus to high impact agencies, outcome measurement, appealing to citizens and positioning the vice president for the 2000 presidential elections.

President Clinton’s Executive Order in 1993 mandated that all federal agencies develop customer service plans, but downsizing and cost savings are the keystones of NPR. Kettl (1994 & 1998) argues the tension between these elements explains the mixed results and is an enduring problem. Agencies are required to develop service standards and use customer surveys, in what are called customer service plans rather than service charters. NPR, including customer service plans, is separate from performance-based management system introduced by the Government Performance Results Act (GPRA) passed by Congress in 1993 and responsibility for GPRA which resides with the Office of Management and Budget. Despite the Presidents

³ The other two are the New Deal and the Hoover Commissions.

1995 directive *Improving Customer Service*, which tied customer service to strategic planning and the GPRA (Gore 1997), NPR has been effectively marginalised from performance management (Kettl 1998).

NPR has had high level political support from the president and strong, sustained leadership by Vice President Gore. In contrast to the UK, it was not part of a more comprehensive civil service reform (Kettl 1998). In the UK parliamentary system John Major had the necessary control of the parliament to legislate reform. The Clinton Administration did not have congressional support after the 1994 mid-term elections and NPR was attacked by a hostile congress. The Citizens Charter had some influence on the NPR customer service plans (Kettl 1994), but NPR grew more directly out of Osborne and Gaebler's (1992) best seller *Reinventing Government* which enunciated ten principles for entrepreneurial government. The language of management and ideas from the private sector underpin this manifesto. David Osborne worked closely with the Progressive Policy Institute and advised the Clinton-Gore administration (Kettl 1998). The NPR reports provide ample evidence of "borrowing from the best in business" including the language of management and marketing.

Setting service standards and making agencies more responsive to customers has shifted the focus from internal processes to agency objectives and people served and encouraged a focus on the needs of citizens rather than administrative convenience (Kettl 1998). In contrast to the UK Charter Mark, the "Hammer Awards" scheme relates to NPR principles rather than service standards specifically. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and US Postal service were the first agencies to publish customer service standards. By 1997, 4,000 standards for 570 federal agencies and programs had been developed (Gore 1997). NPR's customer service focus has transformed the way some government agencies approach citizens in particular the Social Security Administration and Customs Service (Kettl 1998). Many agencies reported increased customer satisfaction, however the results are mixed. A Fifth Year Report Card, prepared by the Brookings Institute (Kettl 1998), gave NPR an overall B grade and a B+ for customer service, noting important accomplishments in some agencies but major failures in others (in particular the IRS). This same report also observed limited public awareness of service standards and argued the narrow focus on managerial improvements "failed to penetrate the consciousness of citizens and the media" (Kettl 1998).

As part of the attempt to reinvigorate reform, NPR was rebadged National Partnership for Reinventing Government with a new slogan America@Its Best. The October 1998 initiative *Look Whose Talking Now: Conversations With America* appears to be a direct response to the lack of public awareness of customer service plans. In contrast to the formality of the UK People's Panel, this requires agencies covered by the original executive order consult directly with customers, implement complaint mechanisms (in the original 1993 Order) and report annually on performance. There was no systematic external monitoring before 1998. External benchmarking is being undertaken using the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI). This is a national indicator developed by the University of Michigan Business School used to benchmark customer satisfaction for private companies since 1994. ACSI is being applied to 30 customer segments of 29 federal agencies to monitor satisfaction and benchmark public services against the private sector. The first survey reported a similar spread of scores for the public and private sectors (see Appendix 2), and that including the government sector increased the overall US score by 2%.⁴

AUSTRALIA: GOVERNMENT SERVICE CHARTERS –“PUTTING SERVICE FIRST”⁵

As in the UK and US, there have been a number of different phases in public management reform in Australia. A chronology of the development of Government Service Charters in the context of NPM reform from 1983 to 1999 is provided in Appendix 3. In pursuit of more efficient and effective services there has been a fundamental shift from traditional financial accountability for budget expenditure to

⁴ ACSI is based on an index developed by Claus Fornell in 1992 for Sweden that has now been applied to a number of countries including the US to benchmark customer satisfaction.

accountability for results. Responsiveness has been pursued by changing the focus of service delivery to a 'customer orientation' by making setting quality standards for public services, benchmarking and measuring performance (DoF 1994; OECD 1996). Government service charters were not introduced nationally until 1997.

Performance management has been central to new public management reform in Australia since the election of the Hawke Labour Government in 1983 (McGuire 1990). The Financial Management Improvement Program (FMIP) introduced in 1994 was modelled in part on the United Kingdom's FMI. In the first phase the focus was on corporate planning and program budgeting. Efforts to link program evaluation and performance monitoring to budget reporting were impeded by inadequate performance indicators, in particular for quality (MAB-MIAC 1992). Service charters were not a feature of this era, which was characterised as a combination of top-down (strategic control) and bottom-up (internal control of implementation by agencies). Accountability for performance was reflected in the language of "managing for results" through evaluation and performance monitoring, linking budgets to performance outcomes, and "letting the managers manage" through devolution of responsibility.

A substantive policy shift occurred in 1993 when the government decided to apply National Competition Policy to the public sector (O'Neill & McGuire 1999). Initially the reform concentrated on government business enterprises but gradually competition policy was extended to community services (IC 1995 & 1996). Increasing application and scope of contracting in this second phase changed the focus of evaluation from internal monitoring to external auditing. Service agreements between different levels of government and contracts with service providers formalise resource allocations and evaluation criteria. A significant in this phase was the establishment of a committee to develop a framework for monitoring the performance of community services. In a series of reports since 1995 the Productivity Commission, acting as the secretariat for the committee, has developed performance indicators including quality and reported on comparative performance of the States.⁶ However, the OECD observed that Australia lagged other OECD countries, notably Canada, the UK and USA, in the development of service charters, service quality standards and customer surveys (OECD 1996 & PUMA 1997).

Public management reform accelerated in scale and scope following the election of the Howard conservative coalition government in 1996, which adopted the recommendations of the National Commission of Audit and extended the application of contestability and market-testing of public service delivery. Separation of funding and service delivery, contracting and competition between service providers, the preferred strategy of the Howard Conservative Government, is the focus of the third phase of reform. Service Charters were one strategy rather than a central feature of this phase. Until 1997 development of charters by federal agencies was ad hoc. The Australian Taxation Office and Child Support Agency developed charters in response to parliamentary and Audit Office inquiries.

'Putting Service First' is the title of the government service charter program announced by the Prime Minister in 1997. All Commonwealth agencies dealing directly with the public were required to identify who their "customers" are and develop a service charter. Implementation was delegated initially to the Minister for Customs and Consumer Affairs and the Department of Industry, Science and Tourism, which held the consumer affairs portfolio. Charters are intended to guarantee specific standards for service delivery for customers and stakeholders, provide a substitute for competition and a benchmark for measuring service quality (DIST 1997a). *'Putting Service First - Principles for Developing a Service Charter sets out nine principles for developing, monitoring and reviewing service charters* (see Appendix 3). Three key features identified in the principles are similar to the UK and US initiatives:

⁶ The cumbersome title of this committee is the Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth-State Service Provision (SCRCSPP). The first report published in 1995 describes the framework for performance monitoring and reported on a substantial range of services and indicators. In annual reports since 1997 the range of services and indicators has steadily increased (SCRCSPP 1997, 1998, 1999 & 2000). This appears to be the most extensive performance monitoring developed by any OECD country and enables comparative benchmarking on a broad range of indicators including service quality.

1. a clear statement to the customer of standards of service which can be expected
2. a clear statement to the customer of who is responsible if service is not provided at the level promised
3. guidance to the customer as to how to access a complaints mechanism if something goes wrong.

Service charters are intended to assist agencies to focus on outputs, define criteria for assessing performance in delivering outputs and benchmarking service quality (MAB 1997). Agencies are required to report on charter development, complaints mechanisms and performance in their Annual report to Parliament. Non-government agencies delivering publicly funded services are not required to develop service charters. A detailed guide prepared by the Service Charter Implementation Unit to assist agencies in developing service charters provided examples of existing charters in Australia and the United Kingdom. AAMI, Taxpayers Charter and the CSA Charter feature prominently in the guide (DIST 1997b).

Support for the development of charters came from the Commonwealth Ombudsman and the Australian Competition and Consumer Council (ACCC) rather than Treasury and Finance, the central agencies responsible for coordinating management reform. The Department of Finance and ANAO whilst supporting the idea of charters to monitor and improve standards of service recognised the limitations when standards are limited to service delivery rather than outcomes (Trosa 1997; DoF 1995; SFPARC 1995).

The Minister for Customs and Consumer Affairs had responsibility for overseeing the implementation of Service Charters across the APS, monitoring and reviewing progress and providing a whole of Government report. A Service Charters Implementation Unit in the Department of Industry, Science and Tourism was established to coordinate the implementation of Service Charters across the APS and provided assistance to agencies. Implementation of service charters was actively pursued in 1997 following the publication of an implementation timetable (DIST 1997c). In the portfolio restructure that followed the re-election of the Howard Government in 1998, responsibility for service charters was transferred to the Contracting and Competitive Tendering (CCT) Branch in the Department of Finance and Administration. The Service Charters Implementation Unit was transferred to the CCT branch, but separated from the consumer affairs program that was transferred to Treasury.⁷

There has been no substantive external review of government service charters. All agencies are required to conduct an external performance audit against charter objectives every three years, however the first audits are not due until 2000. Agencies are required to report annually to the Department of Finance and Administration on their performance against the Charter. DoFA is required to provide a whole-of-government report to the Prime Minister. The first report, due in December 1998 was finally published in October 1999. This two-year whole-of-government report of 26 pages, provided a statistical summary and case studies of implementation rather than an evaluation of the impact of service charters, but did foreshadow a review of the principles (Ellison 1999).

Australian developments have also been influenced by ideas from abroad and the private sector. Citizen's Charter and the private insurance company AAMI's Customer Charter both feature as a case study in the guidelines. The Department of Finance and Administration has been an active participant in OECD projects and comparative studies (PUMA 1994; 1996 & 1997). The Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals and TARP, a private consultancy headquartered in the US with links to Karl Albrecht a consultant and author on service management, also had some influence in the development of the guidelines and training packages. The framework in the Toolkit identifies five best practice principles for quality customer service based on private sector research (MAB-DIST 1997).⁸ Whilst adopting principles of customer service from the private sector, the development of charters for public services has greatly exceeded service guarantees in the private sector. Service guarantees, advocated by the ACCC since 1995, are not common practice. AAMI's Customer Charter introduced in 1996 was a first in the private sector.

⁷ No minister specifically designated with responsibility for Consumer Affairs in the second Howard ministry.

⁸ This is reflected in the further reading suggested in the tool kit, see for example pages 85-88.

Charters have been developed at the federal portfolio, agency and program levels. Policy agencies and functions are exempt from developing a service charter. Progress varied considerably between agencies. Comments in many department and agency annual reports are restricted to progress on development of charters. The Public Service Commissioner reported significant progress with 90 Charters developed by June 1998 (PSC 1998). This report described service delivery improvements attributed to Charters arising from customer feedback; improvement to meet charter service standards; new and improved complaints handling systems; reductions in process and waiting times; and an increased willingness to apologise personally and publicly for mistakes.

The whole-of-government report by the Special Minister of State in November 1999 recorded 125 completed charters (88% of the total required) but only 44% had reported on performance information in their annual reports (Ellison 1999). Not surprisingly service standards in portfolio charters are vague. In contrast agency charters tend to have more explicit standards. Standards relate to process quality (how services are provided) rather than technical quality of services delivered (outputs). Service charters are codes of conduct rather than service guarantees. Service charters do not confer legally enforceable rights on customers, any such rights are set out in legislation, for example the taxation legislation.

Service Charters have led to the wide spread adoption of internal complaint mechanisms. The 1997-98 Annual Report of the Commonwealth Ombudsman reported a clear trend towards better complaints handling in public service agencies attributed to service charters. The Australian National Audit Office also reported improvement in compliant handling, but noted less improvement in the willingness of public servants to adequately explain the reasons for decisions (PSMPC 1998). The early emphasis on developing complaint mechanisms is a distinctive feature of the Australian service charters. By 1999, 89% of charter agencies had operating complaints systems and 77% reported complaint statistics (Ellison 1999). In contrast to the United Kingdom and the United States, Australia has long established new administrative law mechanisms including review of decisions by quasi-judicial tribunals, Freedom of Information legislation and independent Ombudsmen.

The next section compares the experience of the three countries in developing service charters. Significant differences between the country contexts have resulted in divergent strategies and service charter frameworks. Historical analysis, summarised in Figures 1 and 2, suggests that national politics rather than global policy convergence is more significant in explaining the development of service charters in each jurisdiction. This supports Schick's (1999) contention that reform is an amalgam of opportunity, which is country specific, strategy and tactics.

POLICY CONVERGENCE OR DIVERGENCE?

This brief and selective interpretation of the implementation of charters and customers service plans reveals similarities and differences that are summarised in Table 2. There is evidence of convergence at the ideological level as managerial and consumer values underpin service charters and customer service plans. This is reflected in commonality of language and purpose (Kettl 1994 & 1998; Boyne 1996; Walsh 1994). Responsiveness to users or customers and improving service delivery through transparency and accountability are a guiding principle in the charters and customer service plans initiatives. The transfer of ideas is apparent in policy documents and comments by policy makers. Undoubtedly OECD forums have played a role in this transfer. All three countries have been active participants in PUMA projects as well as providing regular comprehensive updates on public management reforms. Common (1998) argues:

What appears to exist is a global policy community that disperses NPM in a piecemeal fashion to receptive political and administrative elites in individual countries.

UK, US and Australia are all clearly part of an NPM international policy community that has shared ideas and experiences to deal with common problems. However this study supports Common's (1998) contention that policy responses to similar problems in countries at a similar stage of economic development are evidence of policy transfer not global convergence. Timing in the three countries suggests that national politics rather than global policy convergence is more significant in explaining the development of service charters. The nature and pace of the implementation of the initiatives are also clearly different. This is explained by different NPM reform strategies reflecting different political context and governance structures. NPM is hard to evaluate (Pollitt 1995) and it is difficult to separate out the impact of charters or customer service plans. This study also provides evidence of tension between charters or customer service plans and wider NPM reforms that Walsh (1994) and Kettl (1994) argue is inherent in the ideology.

Table 2: Comparison Service Charter Initiatives

Comparative Dimensions	United Kingdom	United States	Australia
Governance	<p>"Westminster" Parliamentary democracy within a unitary system Responsible government Parliamentary accountability</p>	<p>"Washington" Republic within a federal system Federalism Bill of Rights & Constitution Divided accountability</p>	<p>"Washminster" Parliamentary democracy within a federal system Hybrid (responsible & federalism) Constitution Parliamentary accountability</p>
Opportunity - New Public Management Reforms			
Phases	<p><i>Phase I Efficiency & Effectiveness (1977-1988)</i> Thatcher Conservative Government FMI</p> <p><i>Phase II Market-testing (1988-1996)</i> Thatcher & Major Conservative Governments Next Steps Agencies</p> <p><i>Phase III Partnership (1996+)</i> Blair Labor Modernising Government</p>	<p><i>Phase I Implementation</i> 1993 NPR (Executive) 1993 GPRA (Executive & Congress) Clinton Administration</p> <p><i>Phase II Performance Review</i> 1994-1998 Clinton Administration</p> <p><i>Phase III National Partnership for Reinventing Government</i> Clinton Administration 1998+</p>	<p><i>Phase I Corporate management</i> 1984-1993 Hawke Labor Government FMIP & program budgeting</p> <p><i>Phase II Contract-based management</i> 1993-1996 Keating Labor Government National Competition Policy</p> <p><i>Phase III Contestability</i> 1996+ Howard Conservative Government Effective Financial Management Contestability services Benchmarking private sector</p>
Implementation	Top-Down	Bottom-up	Top-Down & Bottom-up
Coordinating Agencies	Treasury & Cabinet Office (Office of Public Service)	Executive (NPR) Office of Management & Budget (GPRA)	Department of Finance Management Advisory Board Management Improvement Advisory Committee

Table 2: Comparison Service Charter Initiatives (Cont.)

Comparative Dimensions	United Kingdom	United States	Australia
Language	Phase I (1977-1998) "more for less" Phase II (1988-96) "make the managers manage" Phase III (1997+) "partnerships"	Phase I (1994) "works better, costs less" Phase II (1994 – 1998) "what government should do" Phase III (1998+) "search for political relevance"	Phase I (1984-1993) "managing for results" "let the managers manage" Phase II (1993-1996) "managing for performance" Phase III (1996 +) "best practice financial management"
Performance Monitoring	FMIP & Next steps Focus on efficiency & outputs	GPRA focus on outputs	FMIP focus on results (outputs & outcomes) Agencies (phase I) Agencies & external (phase II) Outputs (phase III)
<i>Responsiveness Strategy</i>			
Service Charter(s)	Citizen Charter (1991-1997) Service First (1997+)	Customer Service Plans (1994+)	No central initiative 1983-1996 Government Service Charters 1997+ (renamed Client Service Charters in June 2000)
Political Support	White Paper Citizen Charter introduced by Prime Minister John Major Service First initiative introduced by Chancellor Duchy Lancaster	Presidential Order NRP championed by Vice-President Al Gore	Ministerial Policy Statement Service charters championed by Minister Consumer Affairs until relocated Finance portfolio 1998.
Coordinating Agency	Citizen's Charter Unit Cabinet Office Service First Unit Cabinet Office		Service First Unit in DIST (1997-1998) moved to CCT branch DOFA and renamed Service Charter Unit 1998+
<i>Responsiveness Tactics</i>			
Service standards	40 national & 10,000 local charters	570 agencies & 4,000 standards	125 agency & program charters
Performance monitoring	Yes Audit Commission published indicators for local authorities	Yes Benchmarking using ACSI since 1998	Yes Agency Annual Reports

Table 2: Comparison Service Charter Initiatives (Cont.)

Comparative Dimensions	United Kingdom	United States	Australia
Performance reporting	Yes	Yes	Yes
Customer surveys	People's Panel	Conversations with America	Agency specific
Complaint mechanisms	Recommendations of Task Force on Complaints (1995) adopted in <i>Service First</i>	Limited progress	Substantive implementation & reporting by agencies Supported by independent Ombudsmen and Australian Competition & Consumer Commission.
Sanction for non-performance	No legal obligations Limited compensation for consumers of some services (British Rail)	No legal obligations	No legal obligations Some links to legislative requirements
Internal Evaluation	Regularly- Ministerial reports on implementation to parliament; parliamentary select committee	Regularly NPR Reports 1994, 1995 & 1997	One Ellison 1999
External Evaluation	Pollitt 1994 Bynoe 1996	Kettl 1994 & 1998	No

Sources:

Bynoe, I. (1996); DoFA (no date) Service Charters International Developments (<http://www.ctc.gov.au/publications/charters/international.htm>); Kettl 1994 & 1998; Kanmensky, J. (1999) *NPR A Brief History* (<http://www.npr.gov/whoarewe/history.html>); OECD 1987 Australia, United Kingdom & United States Country Surveys; OECD 1998 Australia, United Kingdom & United States Public Management Reports; Richards (1998); and, Schick (1999).

Different strategies and tactics to implement NPM are evident in OECD country comparisons (PUMA 1999b, Kettl 1999 & Schick 1999) and the experience with charters in the three countries is consistent with this pattern. There is no single recipe for NPM, nor for consumer responsiveness. Divergent strategy is a feature of the strategic management literature generally, with country variations explained by differences in cultural values, institutional structures and timing or history (de Wit & Meyer 1999). Country specific strategies are evident, charters are one approach and customer service plans another. Timing is a significant explanation of differences, but so is the relationship to broader NPM reform. Citizen's Charter and customer service plans had high level support and leadership, in contrast to Australian service charters. Strategic control by central agencies is more evident in the UK and Australia where charters are tied more closely to performance management than customer service plans. In contrast customer service plans in the US are separate from the GPRA performance management. Early development of complaint mechanism and more progress in reporting complaints in Australia contrasts with the UK and US. This probably reflects different administrative law traditions as Australia has had considerably more experience with new administrative law and already had well established Ombudsmen and FOI systems.

Ideas travel easily in a global world but policy transfer should not be confused with globalisation of strategy (Common 1998). A clearly articulated philosophy of managerialism and consumerism has driven public management reforms in UK, Australia and USA (Kettl 1994; Walsh 1994 & Schick 1999). Objectives are similar in all three countries, but strategies and techniques are different. This study of service charters suggests policy transfer rather than convergent NPM strategy. Divergence reflects the influence of local conditions on attempts to resolve universal problems.

Implementation in each of the three countries has drawn on private sector techniques in particular for consumer surveys and service quality indicators. The language of Osborne & Gaebler reflected Peters & Waterman's earlier best seller *In Search Of Excellence*. This is the language of marketing and management which has limitations applied to public services (Walsh 1994). The next section considers the limits of the customer service model of responsiveness.

LIMITS OF THE CUSTOMER SERVICE MODEL OF RESPONSIVENESS

Meyers & Lacey (1996) suggest "efforts to make public services more responsive to customers as the direct consumer of its products" rely on two main instruments of market contestability and providing consumers with a stronger voice. Charters and customer service plans are an attempt to empower consumers of public services by voice mechanisms. Effectiveness of charters as a voice mechanism depends on transparency and openness of performance reporting and complaint mechanisms. Performance reporting relies on information including user surveys and is central to the initiatives in all three jurisdictions. Performance monitoring has become increasingly important as governments strive to demonstrate to an increasingly sceptical community that public services deliver value for money and agencies competing for funding to deliver public services are forced to compete on the basis of performance. Performance monitoring is essentially a quantitative methodology that requires criteria and indicators for measuring the quality of service delivery and program outcomes.

There are two problems in relying on performance monitoring as a voice mechanism to improve client responsiveness. The first is the conceptual and technical complexity of monitoring service quality, which is a problem for setting standards and monitoring public and private services. The second problem is that quality indicators derived from services marketing and management research do not take into account the characteristics of public services (Walsh 1994 & 1995).

Quality an imprecise and elusive concept

Quality is an abstract concept that eludes precise definition. There is widespread agreement that quality is an important performance criterion. In the private sector the concern is with the links between service

quality, customer satisfaction and profitability as a measure of performance.⁹ However there is considerable debate about the precise nature of this relationship and consequently the appropriate measures for monitoring service quality. There are conceptual and technical problems in monitoring service quality (Carter 1991, Carter & Greer 1993). The origins of the approach are in TQM theories and practices developed for the private sector (Bynoe 1996; McGuire 1997). Quality relates to product attributes which for services resides in the activities and processes that are experienced rather than tangible objects that are possessed.¹⁰

Three different perspectives on service quality evident in the services marketing and management literature are summarised in Table 3.¹¹ Conformance to standards is a delivery process perspective that relies on quality assurance standards and indicators for performance management. Quality assurance and certification are two indicators of the reliability of processes. ISO accreditation systems, on time delivery and quality awards are different indicators. Customer perceptions' is a consumer perspective on service delivery that relies on customer standards and satisfaction indicators. Service quality has technical and process dimensions. Technical quality relates to what is delivered or the output. Customer service or process quality relates to the way services are delivered. Standards in charters and customer service plans focus more on process quality than technical quality. Customer satisfaction indices are the most common indicator used to monitor performance. The third perspective, performance outcomes is a provider perspective on quality. Standards and indicators are of performance defined as results against objectives. Customer loyalty and retention rates are used to measure the value (profitability) of customers to a service provider.

Service quality indicators recommended by consultants are generally based on one of these perspectives. These perspectives lead to different indicators resulting in service providers concentrating on different activities. Service charters, a customer perspective conflict with performance outcomes from a provider' perspective. This inherent tension is apparent in the NPM experience. More significantly, perspectives on service quality derived from services marketing and management research generally ignore the implications of the characteristics of public services for performance monitoring and indicators (Walsh 1991 & 1994). Three characteristics of publicly services have implications for performance monitoring in general and service quality in particular (McGuire 1996). Public services have social as well as economic value. Indicators of social value are justice, equity and fair processes. The benefits of public services are consumed collectively by the community as well as privately by users. These are different stakeholders with an interest in performance which means service delivery has to be evaluated from multiple perspectives. Accountability tests are based on performance outcomes against public policy objectives specified in legislation. Table 3 compares the basis of accountability for these three perspectives.

Accountability is complex for public services

Accountability is fundamental to governance in democratic systems. Setting service standards and monitoring performance is part of a wider shift under NPM from political to managerial accountability

⁹ For a recent review of research knowledge see Zeithaml 2000.

¹⁰ There is a vast literature of service quality that draws on TQM, management and marketing but there is general agreement that quality is different for services because of the way services are produced, consumed and valued. This is discussed in Chapters 3 & 6 in McGuire 1999.

¹¹ This literature is examined in McGuire 1998 Chapter 6. Halligan (1995:93) distinguished three types of quality:

1. Quality as standards (inputs)
2. Quality as service delivery (outputs)
3. Quality as outcomes (results against objectives)

'Customer perceptions of service delivery' does not equate simply with 'outputs'. Whilst the focus is on service delivery, the perspective is that of customer/consumer rather than service provider. Perceived service quality is a measure of the quality of service delivery and customer satisfaction is a measure of the value of service delivery (costs and quality). 'Outcomes' relates to the objectives of the service provider which are assumed to be profitability. In the services marketing and management literature the assumption is that customers and consumers fund or purchase, and providers supply or deliver services.

(Zifcak 1994). However this is a narrowing of the definition of accountability. The limitations of the service quality perspectives derived from the private sector are summarised in Table 3. Service charters highlight user interests but there is more to public services. Citizens and users (consumers) both have an interest in public services and accountability mechanisms must take into account both perspectives. In the language of business responsiveness is to stakeholders, not just customers.

The idea that public agencies have customers is a recent one (Osborne & Plastrik 1997: 201), transplanted into the public sector with the quality movement and management consultants armed with their tool kits based on strategies for competitive markets (Micklethwait & Wooldridge 1996). Applying the concept of customers in order to specify standards is difficult for public services (McGuire 1997). Clinton's 1993 executive order defines customers as "an individual or entity who is directly served by a department or agency". Osborne recognises that one problem with this definition is confusing 'compliers' with customers and strategies for voluntary compliance with competitive markets. Tax-payers are compliers compelled by legislative authority not customers with a choice between competing suppliers.

Table 3: Perspectives on Service Quality¹²

Conformance to standards	Fitness for purpose	
	Customer (consumer) perceptions outcomes	Provider perceptions outcomes (Results against objectives)
Standards relate to service processes	Standards relate to service attributes customers' value	Standards relate to provider's objectives
Performance monitored by certification of standards and quality assurance	Performance monitored by customers perceptions of quality and value of services delivered	Performance monitored by value of results to provider
Focus on inputs, activities and processes	Focus on outputs (services delivered) and value to customer (outcomes)	Focus outputs (services delivered) outcomes and (value to providers)
<i>Professional control standards</i>	<i>Consumer control standards</i>	<i>Provider control standards</i>
<i>Indicators:</i> Reliability of processes Accreditation Quality certification	<i>Indicators:</i> Customers perceptions of service delivery Customer satisfaction	<i>Indicators:</i> Return to provider on quality investment Value of customers to service providers Customer retention, loyalty & referrals
<i>Accountability for activities and processes</i>	<i>Accountability for customer (customer) perceptions of service delivery</i>	<i>Accountability for service delivery outcomes (results)</i>
<i>Monitoring processes against professional standards benchmarks</i>	<i>Monitoring satisfaction, complaints</i>	<i>Monitoring results by comparing outputs & outcomes to objectives and valuing the impact</i>
Limitations applied to professional public services		
<i>Links between resources, activities, processes are complex</i>	<i>Customers who pay for services, consumers who use services and citizens with rights and entitlements have different perspectives on quality and value.</i>	<i>Separate funders, purchasers and providers have different perspectives on quality, value and performance outcomes</i>
<i>Services are delivered in systems and outputs are hard to separate for different services processes and agencies in system</i>	<i>Multiple stakeholders with different expectations & perceptions.</i>	<i>Multiple stakeholders have different objectives. Public services have social objectives</i>

¹² Source: This conceptual framework has been developed by the author in current doctoral research to investigate the use of performance monitoring as a strategy to improve service quality and responsiveness.

Customers, clients and citizens are different conceptions of stakeholder relationships. Osborne recognised that “citizens are ultimately more important than customers, and accountability to the elected representatives of those citizens is more important than accountability to customers” (Osborne & Plastrik 1997: 201). These multiple accountabilities to citizens, ministers, customers, clients that limit models adapted from the private sector problematic (McGuire 1990 & 1997). Responsiveness to consumers is important but only one dimension of effectiveness. As Bynoe (1996: 25) argues:

People receiving public services – or their public agents - are more than mere shoppers in some social supermarket.

A further difficulty for public services is the complexity of the links in accountability chains. Contracting and market testing increase this complexity. Public services, for example health, education and aged care, are delivered in complex systems usually involving multiple agents. This tends to limit and obscure accountability rather than making it more transparent. Public programs are designed to deal with what are referred to as “wicked problems”. Governments become involved because markets fail. Competition is for public funds not customers. Public enterprise satisfies needs. In contrast private enterprise satisfies demand, that is needs backed by purchasing power. Performance is defined as how well a service meets its objectives. The objectives are usually clear enough – healthy, literate community able to actively participate in economic and social life – but the links between activities, processes, outputs and outcomes to achieve these objectives are not so clear.

RESPONSIVENESS – DILEMMA OR PARADOX

Customer service language brings with it market logic to which has to be added democratic logic (Walsh 1994). Market logic is based on the assumption of customer power (consumer sovereignty) achieved through exit and choice mechanisms. Democratic logic is based on the assumption of citizen power (voter sovereignty) achieved through voice mechanisms such as complaints systems and new administrative law. It is not surprising then that attention is turning to these mechanisms.

Service charters as a strategy for more responsive service delivery is based on the assumption that applying marketing techniques can improve quality and there is some truth in this (Walsh 1994). Effectiveness depends on voice rather than choice mechanisms. However service delivery is not all there is to responsive government. Walsh (1994: 69) succinctly encapsulates the problem:

The danger of defining the public realm as the arena in which services are exchanged for taxes is that politics is reduced to service delivery rather than government, seen as authoritative decision based on collective commitment.

Citizens are customers *and* owners (Kettl 1994, 28). This is a paradox to be resolved by managing both relationships not a dilemma to solved by an either or choice. Political and managerial dimensions of accountability are not separate as is assumed in NPM. This is a recycling of old attempts to separate policy and administration in earlier reforms. The problems of managing the provision of public services are managerial *and* political. So accountability must have managerial and political dimensions. The difficulty is that responsiveness to citizens as recipients of service conflicts with responsiveness to citizens as taxpayers (Walsh 1994; Kettl 1994). Kettl argues performance management is more useful guide than customer service for government action. But performance management does not resolve the conceptual and technical difficulties of service quality.

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Appendix 1: United Kingdom – Citizen’s Charter & Service First

Year	Reports, Recommendations & Decisions
1979 Election Margaret Thatcher's conservative government	Recruited Dereck Rayner from the private sector as head Efficiency Unit in Cabinet Office
1982	White Paper <i>Efficiency and Effectiveness in the Civil Service</i> (Cm 8616) Financial Management Initiative (FMI) changed focus from process to results with emphasis on efficiency
1987 Re-election Margaret Thatcher's conservative government	Efficiency Unit Report to Prime Minister <i>Improving Management in Government: The Next Steps</i> recommended split between policy and service delivery functions by creating executive agencies and market testing of services.
1988	Next Steps program established separate agencies and parent departments Treasury & Civil Service Committee House of Commons inquiry provided bipartisan support for Next Steps
1989	ANAO review first year of Next Steps
1990 John Major became Prime Minister	
1991	<p>White Paper <i>Citizen's Charter Raising The Standard</i> (Cm 1599)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four themes – quality, choice, standards & value for money • Six principles for charter standards – standards, information and openness, choice and consultation, courtesy and helpfulness, putting things right & value for money • Charter Mark Awards Scheme • Clear and well publicised complaints procedures • Citizen's Charter Unit established in Cabinet Office to coordinate program <p>White Paper <i>Competing for Quality</i> (Cm 1599) National Consumer Council Report <i>The Citizen's charter: getting it right for consumers</i></p>

1992 Re-election John Major's conservative government	Next Steps Agencies Review 1992 (Cm 2111) reported on quality, financial, efficiency and throughput targets for 76 Executive Agencies White Paper <i>The Citizen's Charter: First Report 1992 (Cm 2101)</i> Audit Commission <i>Charting a Course: Citizen's Charter Indicators</i>
1994	White Paper <i>The Citizen's Charter Second Report 1994 (Cm 2540)</i>
1995	White Paper <i>The Citizen's Charter; The Facts and figures: A report to mark four years of the Citizen's Charter (Cm 2970)</i> reported improvements in delivery times for many services Audit Commission <i>Read All About It</i> , Guidance on the Publication by Local authorities of the Citizen's Charter Indicators (HMSO) National Consumer Council Report <i>Consumer Concerns</i> showed increases in satisfaction with local council services and the NHS since 1991. The Citizen's Charter Complaints Task Force Report <i>Putting Things Right</i> recommended a set of principles for effective complaints systems.
1997 Election Tony Blair's Labour Government	White Paper <i>Better Government</i> (HMSO) Review Citizen's Charter program
1998	Chancellor introduced <i>Service First</i> The New Charter Programme to replace Citizen's Charter to change emphasis from 'value for money' to 'more effective use resources', a new audit team to monitor quality and a review of all existing charters. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nine principles of public service delivery: set standards of service, be open and provide full information, consult and involve, encourage access and promotion of choice, treat all fairly, put things right when they go wrong, use resources effectively, innovate and improve, work in partnership with other providers • Six new standards to improve central government. • Service First Unit (Cabinet Office) responsible for coordination charter program National Consumer Council Report on Local Charters MORI & Birmingham University School Public Policy commissioned to establish " <i>People's Panel</i> " of 5,000 randomly selected representative citizens to be surveyed and consulted about service delivery improvement. Chancellor announced FOI legislation to provide legal basis for public services.

1999	<p>White Paper <i>Modernising Government</i> (Cm 4310) announced new mechanisms for managing service delivery and changed emphasis to partnerships and consultation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • comprehensive spending review of all central and local government services • Public Service Agreements (PSAs) to set new targets, hold Ministers and departments accountable for priorities and replace annual with three year spending plans • new Cabinet Committee to monitor performance • new Productivity Panel • annual report on progress for Parliament • public sector benchmarking project to spread Business Excellence Model • best value to replace compulsory competitive tendering in local government <p>40 national and 10,000 local charters exist. Benchmark is 5% improvement in satisfaction by April 2001.</p>
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Appendix 2: United States - Customer Service Plans

Year	Reports, Recommendations & Decisions
1992 Election President Clinton (Democratic White House Administration)	
1993	<p>Vice President Al Gore's "Reinventing Government Summit" with corporate executives, government leaders, and leading organisational change consultants.</p> <p>President Clinton established National Performance Review (NPR) with Vice President Gore as leader.</p> <p>NPR Status Report <i>From Red Tape to Results: Creating a Government That Works Better and Costs Less</i> (September) detailed 384 recommendations including strategies to improve customer service.</p> <p>NPR Report <i>Improving Customer Service</i> (September)</p> <p>President Clinton's Executive Order 12862 (11 September) required all executive agencies providing significant services directly to the public to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. identify the customers who are, or should be, served by the agency; 2. survey customers to determine the kind and quality of services they want and their level of satisfaction with existing services; 3. post service standards and measure results against them; 4. benchmark customer service performance against the best in business; 5. survey front-line employees on barriers to, and ideas for, matching the best in business; 6. provide customers with choice in both the sources of service and the means of delivery; 7. make information, services, and compliant systems easily accessible; and 8. provide means to address customer complaints. <p>Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) passed by Congress required all federal agencies to develop strategic plans, performance measures by 1997 and report on performance annually (from 2000).</p>

<p>1994 Mid term congressional elections resulted in Republican party majority Congress</p>	<p>Brookings Institute external appraisal of NPR (Kettl 1994)</p> <p>NPR Report <i>Putting Customers First: Standards for Serving the American People</i> (September)</p>
<p>1995</p>	<p>NPR Report <i>Common Sense Government: Works Better and Costs Less</i> (September) detailed a further 180 recommendations.</p> <p>President Clinton's Memorandum <i>Improving Customer Service</i> (23 March) required agencies to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • publish customer service standards by 1 September • measure and report results against standards annually • develop customer service tracking measures • survey employees <p>NPR <i>Putting Customers First '95</i> (October) reported on 214 agencies with 3,000 service standards.</p> <p>General Accounting Office Report <i>Management Reform: Implementation of the NPR Recommendations</i> (GAO/OGC-95-1)</p>
<p>1996 Re-election President Clinton</p>	<p>NPR Report <i>Reinvention's Next Steps: Governing in a Balanced Budget World</i> (March)</p> <p>General Accounting Office Report <i>Management Reform: Completion Status of Agency Actions Under the NPR</i> (GAO/OGC-96-94)</p>
<p>1997</p>	<p>President Clinton & Vice President Gore NPR <i>Putting Customers First, 97</i> (October) reported:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4,000 standards for 570 federal departments, agencies & programs (published on Internet) • results identified for 2,800 standards • formal surveys customers by 150 agencies • Roper poll recorded increase in public confidence in government from 17% 1993 to 26% • many case examples of service delivery improvements • Vice President Gore's Hammer awards for reinvention success <p>Federal agencies submitted strategic plans under GPRA. Federal agencies submitted first annual performance plans under GPRA.</p>

1998	<p>New name NPR National Partnership for Reinventing Government New slogan NPR America@ItsBest</p> <p>President Clinton's Memorandum <i>Look Who's talking Now: Conversations with America</i> (3 March) required agencies to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • report monthly on initiatives • implement customer complaints processes • report annually on customer service results <p>Brookings Institute external review NPR <i>A Fifth-Year Report Card</i> (Kettl 1998):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A+ for effort • B+ for customer service <p>Customer satisfaction to be included in a balanced set of measures for assessing agency performance</p>
1999	<p>US Government Customer Satisfaction Initiative (January) survey of 7,723 citizens covering 29 federal services included in the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) enabling benchmarking "high impact" federal agencies against the private sector.</p> <p>ACSI results (December 1999):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • government-wide customer satisfaction index of 68.6 on 100-point scale (6 % lower than private sector aggregate score) • individual agencies ratings ranged from 51 to 87 (private sector spread 53 to 86) • including government sector in ACSI increased US score from 72.1 to 73 (US score is used for international comparisons) • % customers who complain is lower than private sector (may reflect difficulty complaints processes) • 60% customers more satisfied with services <p>(Prior to 1999 ACSI included IRS, US Postal Service, local garbage and police agencies.) ACSI is to be repeated in 2000</p>

Sources:

NPR National Partnership for Reinventing Government (formerly National Performance Review) website, <http://www.npr.gov/>
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Appendix 3: Australia - Government Service Charters

Year	Reports, Recommendations & Decisions
1983 Election Hawke Labor Government	
1984	Financial Management Improvement Program (FMIP) introduced financial management and budgetary reforms to assist government to manage for results and use resources efficiently. Focus was on corporate management, program budgeting and evaluation. Performance evaluation frameworks and monitoring by central agencies to reassert strategic control.
1992	<p>Task Force on Management Improvement <i>Australian Public Service Reformed. An evaluation of a decade of Management Reform</i> (December) review of the FMIP included a survey of (2,400) users of programs and services. Reported users had low expectations of quality but high levels of satisfaction with direct contact with agencies. Reported and improvement in quality and focus on clients but stressed the need to improve client service across public service. Identified the need for better definitions of results, better specification of qualitative and quantitative performance information and greater use of client oriented performance standards as an area for future reform. (MAB 1992)</p> <p>Parliamentary review of the Australian Taxation Office by the Public Accounts Committee recommended the development of a service charter.</p>
1994	<p>Australian Public Service Commission Draft Australian Competency in "Client Service" (Kettl 1994 Appendix I)</p> <p>Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision (SCRCCSP) established by Council of Australian Governments to develop objective and consistent data to benchmark the performance of Commonwealth and State government services.</p>
1995	<p>Department of Finance Report <i>Quality for our clients. Improvement for the Future</i> reported on an increasing number of agencies adopting a client focus, a diverse array of quality initiatives to improve service delivery and recommended quality standards and targets should be part of performance information, but did not recommend charters. (DoF 1995)</p> <p>TARP Australia Study of Complaints handling in Australia for American Express & Society of Consumer affairs Professional in Business. A national survey founding that 15% of complaints found that were directed to government or community organisations. Report considered at a conference in Canberra <i>Quality of Service and Customer Satisfaction</i>, sponsored jointly by The Society of Consumer affairs Professional in Business (SOCAP), Trade Practices Commission and the Commonwealth Ombudsman.</p>

	<p>Western Australia Government introduced comprehensive Service Charter Initiative based on Citizen's Charter.</p> <p>Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee Report <i>Service Delivery by the Australian Public Service</i> (December).</p> <p>Recommended departments and agencies focus on service quality improvement, review service standards, report on service quality and client consultation in annual reports and establish internal complaints mechanisms based on recommendations by Ombudsman, Society of Consumer Affairs Professional and Trade Practices Commission (SFPARC 1995).</p> <p><i>Government Service Provision</i> first report of SCRCSSP (1995) developed quality indicators for extensive range community services.</p>
<p>1996 Election Howard conservative coalition government</p>	<p>Draft Taxpayers Charter released for public comment.</p> <p>Management Advisory Board (MAB) commissioned <i>The Quality in Customer Service Project</i> to identify best practice and disseminate information to agencies.</p> <p>National Commission of Audit <i>Report to the Commonwealth Government</i> (June) reviewed role of government, activities and finances, argues Commonwealth government had fallen behind best practice overseas, in state government and the private sector. Recommended reconsideration of role of Government in service provision, separation of policy and service delivery, introduction contestable markets and contracting for services, user pays, user choice, transfer funds to customers or purchasers. (NCA 1996)</p> <p>Industry Commission Report <i>Competitive Tendering and Contracting in Public Agencies</i> advocated competitive tendering and contracting focused on service outcomes to improve accountability, quality and cost-effectiveness of public services by defining services and opening delivery to competition from external suppliers. (IC 1996)</p> <p>Child Support Agency published service charter (July)</p> <p>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Public Service released discussion paper <i>Towards a Best Practice Public Service</i> (November) which outlines the government's strategy for reforming the public service. Government service charters were identified as a mechanism for improving accessibility, transparency and responsiveness of the public service. (Reith 1996).</p>
<p>1997</p>	<p>Prime Minister's <i>More Time for Business</i> statement announced introduction of Service Charters for all federal agencies (24 March) responsibility for implementation given to Minister for Customers and Consumer Affairs Service Charters Implementation Unit established in the Department of Industry Science & Tourism (DIST)</p>

Putting Service First – Principles for Developing a Service Charter (March) sets out nine principles for developing, monitoring and reviewing service charters (DIST 1997c):

1. clear identification of the agency, its purpose, customers and services
2. facilitate communication between the agency and its customers
3. set out customer service standards and customer rights and responsibilities
4. articulate the agencies policy on obtaining customer feedback and handling enquires and complaints
5. to be developed in consultation with customers, staff and key stakeholders
6. designed and promoted in a format and style that meets the needs and expectations of customers
7. supported by effective, timely, low cost and accessible mechanisms for resolving customer complaints
8. commits the agency to monitoring charter compliance and review of charter effectiveness
9. public accountability by annually publishing the charter and information on compliance and performance

Agencies are required to monitor and review progress internal and externally every three years and include performance information in annual reports.

Commonwealth Ombudsman *A Good Practice Guide for Effective Complaint Handling* (June)

Tax Payers Charter published (July)

Minister for Consumer Affairs released *Service Charters Implementation Timetable* (August) requiring 115 agencies to complete charters within two years (DIST1997a).

Developing Service Charters A Guide for Commonwealth Agencies and Enterprises, November (DIST 1997b)

The Quality in Customer Service Package (November) a framework based on five best practice principles for agencies to develop charters (MAB/DIST 1997):

- *Report: Quality in Customer Service in the Australian Public Service* (MAB)
- *The Better Practice Guide to Quality in Customer Service* (joint publication MAB and ANAO)
- *Toolkit: Quality in Customer Service* (MAB & DIST)

<p>1998 Re-election Howard conservative coalition Government</p>	<p>Restructure Portfolios (October) responsibility for service charters moved to Competitive Tendering & Contracting Branch of the Department of Finance and Administration</p> <p><i>State of Service the Service Report 1997-98</i>, Public Service Commissioner's reported significant progress in developing charters (PSMPC 1998):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 87% (90) of charters listed in the implementation timetable completed by June 1998 • some charters were delayed by reviews and administrative changes following the 1998 election • 112 Charters completed as at 25 November 1998 • agencies not required to develop charters are developing or planning charters
<p>1999</p>	<p>Two-year (July 1997-June 1999) whole-of-government report <i>Service Charters in the Australian Public Service</i> (25 pages) by Special Minister of State (Ellison 1999):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 88% (125) of 148 Charter listed for completion by June 1999 published • 98% charters included standards for service delivery and relationships with customers • 82% charter agencies have systems to record customer feedback • 89% charter agencies have customer complaints systems operating • 77% charter agencies report complaints data • 82% charters developed in consultation with staff and customers, 66% developed in consultation with staff, customers and stakeholders • 69% have systems to measure performance against charter standards • 80% charter agencies reported on compliance with charter in annual report; 77% reported complaints statistics; 40% reported performance data for full year <p>Nine principles service charters to be reviewed and foreshadowed a change in emphasis to outcomes Foreshadowed establishment of a high-profile awards scheme <i>Excellence in Customer Service</i></p>

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MAB-MIAC Management Advisory Board-Management Improvement Advisory Committee Task Force on Management Improvement (1992) *The Australian Public Service Reformed. An Evaluation of Management Reform*, Canberra, AGPS

OECD PUMA *Public Management Profiles 1992 Australia*, <http://www.oecd.org/puma/country/uk.htm>

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